

Center for Youth Leadership

Why wait for someone else to make a difference?

Connecticut Legislature
Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement
***Testimony in Support of SB 398: An Act Assisting Students Accepted
into DACA with the Cost of College***

February 26, 2015

Kaela Teele

Good morning Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and members of the committee. We have a special greeting for Representative Flexer, with whom we have worked on domestic violence issues.

My name is Kaela Teele and I am a member of the Center for Youth Leadership at Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk. On behalf of our 226 members, I am here to testify in support of *SB 398, which looks to help immigrant students accepted into DACA with the cost of college.*

The Center for Youth Leadership addresses several social issues, including the rights of immigrants, which for us includes day laborers, domestic workers and students our age. While we very much enjoy the direct service, public awareness and social change work we do with day laborer and domestic works, nothing compares to the work we do with our friends and peers who do not have papers. And we're not talking about a handful of students. According to some estimates, upwards of 300 students out of the 1,700 students at our school do not have papers.

We lead workshops for them and their parents about academic success, gangs, college applications, trauma, employment and integration into our school and the city of

Norwalk. In partnership with Connecticut Students for a Dream, we hosted a clinic a couple of years ago to enroll people in DACA. And we traveled to Hartford last year to meet with members of the Board of Regents for Higher Education about institutional aid for immigrant students interested in college.

As you can imagine, these students sustain themselves with the promise of hope. The hope for a future that is free from the shadows, free from shame and free from stigma; the hope for a better life based on fairness and justice. It's the same hope that we suspect you hold for your children, your nieces and your nephews.

But here's the catch: my friends live on the outskirts of hope. They may receive a diploma from my school; they may graduate with high honors and receive letters of acceptance from several colleges, but they throw their hands up in frustration. "Why should I care?," they ask. "Why should I worry about my grades? It's not like I can go to college or anything. How can I ever afford it?"

You can help them afford it by passing this bill. We have come way too far in Connecticut in the debate about immigration not to pass this legislation. There was the in-state tuition debate. The debate about identify cards in New Haven. Driver's licenses for immigrants. And now this bill, which is beyond common sense. Everyone pays tuition; a portion of everyone's tuition it is pooled into a fund; everyone should have access to the fund, regardless of citizenship status. The bottom line is that it's the right thing - the just thing - to do.

Thank you very much for listening.

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